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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001190

SIPDIS

NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: President's party weighs in on Tigers, GSL, and alliance with left-wingers

Refs: Colombo 1143, and previous

(U) Classified by Donald Camp, Charge d'Affaires.
Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: In the wake of the June Tokyo donors conference, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, and her People's Alliance (PA) party, have been relatively quiet in their attacks on Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and his government's ruling United National Party (UNP). In recent meetings with Charge, key presidential advisors and high-ranking PA members discussed the PA's mounting distrust of the Tigers, the president's continuing uneasy cohabitation relationship with the PM, and their commitment to an alliance with a radical, left-wing Sinhala chauvinist party. Perhaps reflecting the general popularity of the peace process, the PA members were all clear that a (potential) change in government would not mean a breakdown in talks, at least from their side. END SUMMARY

PA WARINESS OF THE TIGERS

2. (C) The most vocal interlocutor against the actions of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was key presidential advisor Lakshman Kadirgamar who met with Charge on June 27. Kadirgamar characterized the recent sidelining of LTTE theoretician Anton Balasingham as noteworthy, with LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran's higher visibility correlating to a more hardline approach. (Note: Just prior to the Tokyo conference, Balasingham abruptly cut short his trip to the Wannu, a move seen as suggesting that Prabhakaran was changing negotiating tack.) In separate meetings with Charge, Opposition Leader Mahinda Rajapakse and Anura Bandaranaike (President Kumaratunga's brother) were also harshly critical of the LTTE's belligerent attitude and continual rejection of each and every government offer of an interim administration. Rajapakse said the Tigers were also destroying any public softening of attitudes toward them with the recent killings of anti-LTTE Tamil politicians.

3. (C) (Note: Bandaranaike stated, however, that the president maintains an informal mid-level dialogue with the LTTE through intermediaries. Through them, she has assured the Tigers of her intent to continue the peace process, regardless of who is in government.)

COHABITATION REMAINS FRAGILE

4. (C) Kadirgamar and Bandaranaike highlighted the tense cohabitation situation. They acknowledged the prime minister's efforts to engage the Tigers in the peace process, even speaking of the president's support for the government's interim administration proposals. In the next breath, however, each complained about the PM's lack of consultation -- on the peace process, on ministry issues -- with the president. While the president knew working with the prime minister was essential, especially re the peace process, Kadirgamar stated that cohabitation was not really working and Bandaranaike reminded us of his sister's strong dislike for the PM. Kadirgamar added that it was a long-standing request of the PA to be included in the peace talks. Rajapakse said that the president's non-consultative move to take over the Development Lotteries Board was retaliation against the PM for his absence of consultation with her.

COMMITMENT TO AN ALLIANCE WITH JVP

5. (C) For months, the media has been detailing the impending linkup between the PA and the left-wing, Sinhala chauvinist Janantha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). Reports focus on the unresolved differences between the two as dates for the final inking of the deal are

regularly announced, passed, and then rescheduled weeks later. All the PA interlocutors, however, consistently told us the differences are being worked out and the alliance will be signed. Anura said such an alliance was a matter of survival for both parties. The growing electoral strength of the JVP has made them attractive to the PA, especially in the latter's desire to regain control of parliament. Still, snap elections following any alliance do not seem likely. Bandaranaike opined that his sister would call for general elections before the scheduled April 2004 provincial council elections, reasoning that the new PA-JVP alliance would win the general election and, therefore, the provincial one as well. Bandaranaike dismissed the risk of losing PA supporters over such an alliance, stating his party followers had greater disillusionment with the current UNP government than with the JVP.

16. (C) Both Bandaranaike and Rajapakse claimed the JVP had changed its opposition to the peace process, although Bandaranaike indicated a presidential warning to walk away from the proposed alliance may have helped them change their minds. Calling the current JVP "mainstream," Kadirgamar characterized the change in dealing with the JVP as "democracy at work."

17. (C) Original differences between the parties related to the JVP's aversion to the peace process and unwillingness to accept any "devolution" of power to the LTTE. At the moment, the sticking points seem to be over the logistics of power sharing, both within the PA and between the two parties. The JVP reportedly has blamed political jockeying within the PA for the hold up in finalizing the alliance. Rajapakse, for his part, stated that his position in the party had not changed and he remains senior vice president. When pressed on the issue, he did all but admit that the president was using the alliance to ensure a political future for her brother, Anura Bandaranaike. (Note: Bandaranaike is arguably vying with Rajapakse for control within the president's Sri Lankan Freedom Party, the main faction of the PA.)

18. (C) COMMENT: With the constant guessing as to the PA's future moves, it was telling that all three interlocutors had similar messages, perhaps indicating a rough unity at the top. While roundly critical of the Tigers, no one offered a different approach for working with the group or suggested alternatives to the PM's peace process efforts. Each interlocutor focused negatively on the lack of consultation and congenial working relationship between the president and prime minister, instead of specific deficiencies in the government. Rather than working on the poor cohabitation relationship, the president may only be waiting for the finalized alliance with the JVP to set the stage for eventual election. For the moment, however, the party appears committed to the peace process and not poised to make any sudden changes within in the government.

19. (U) Minimize considered.

CAMP